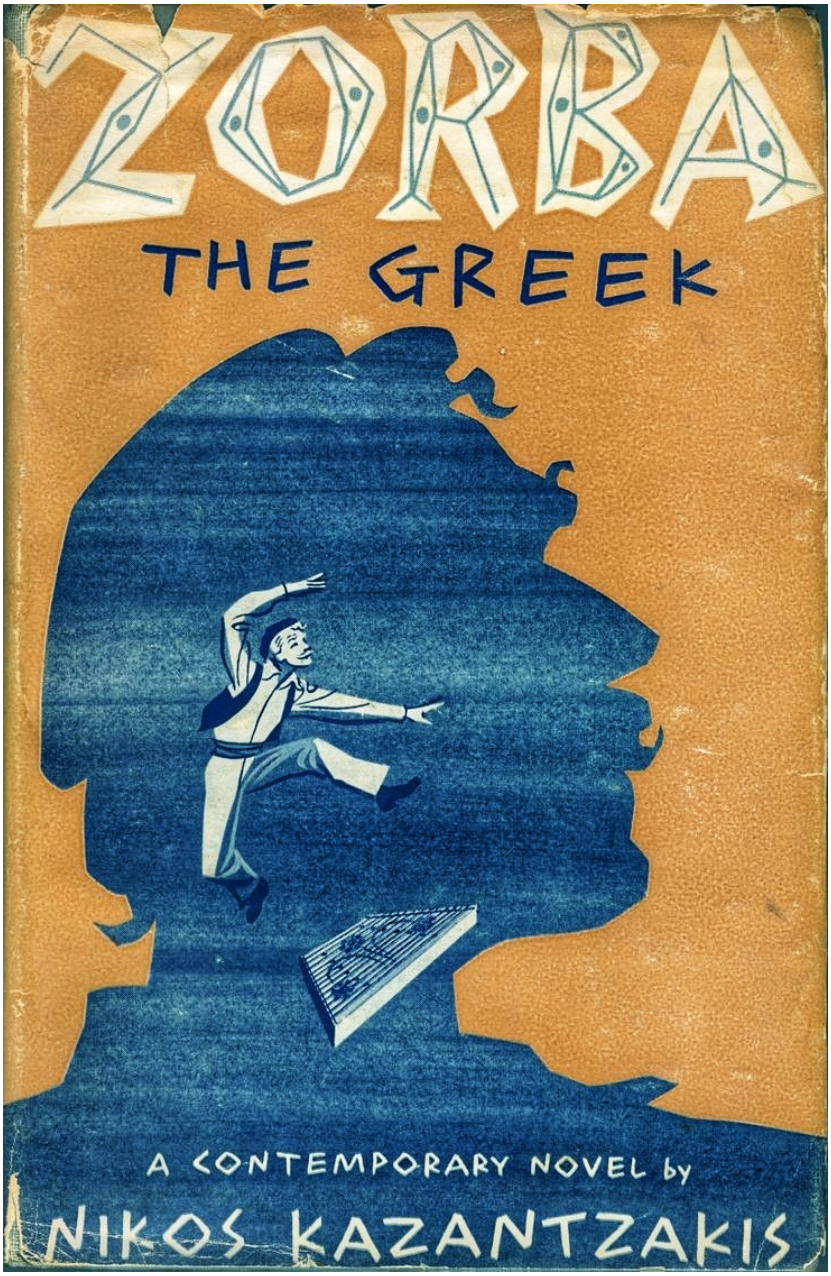
1. Existentialism and Nietzschean Philosophy in “Zorba the Greek” 🎙️📒

thelifeofmine3.wordpress.com/2024/08/16/1-existentialism-and-nietzschean-philosophy-in-zorba-the-greek/

August 16, 2024



“***Zorba the Greek*“,** a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis published in 1946, features the vibrant and adventurous Zorba, a 65-year-old man, and an unnamed young Greek intellectual seeking a new path in life. They travel to Crete to develop a lignite mine, forming a deep bond as they face various challenges. Kazantzakis uses their experiences to explore profound themes like the relationship between *God and man, good versus evil, and the search for purpose*.

Zorba the Greek follows the unnamed narrator, who embarks on a journey of self-discovery with Alexis Zorba. Set in 1916, the story begins in a Piraeus café after the narrator's friend Stavridakis leaves to aid persecuted Greeks. The narrator plans to reopen a lignite mine on Crete and agrees to take Zorba along, intrigued by his odd charm and cooking skills.

As they travel to Crete, Zorba, a former rebel fighter, shares his views on life and liberation. Upon arriving, they find lodging at the inn run by Madame Hortense, a widow with a storied past. Despite objections from a village elder, they stay at the inn and enjoy a hearty lunch with Madame Hortense. She recounts her past influence over world powers, leading Zorba to affectionately call her "Bouboulina." That night, Zorba becomes her lover.

The following morning, Zorba and the narrator discuss women and love, while Zorba begins working as the mine foreman. The narrator is impressed by Zorba's vibrant outlook and his ability to experience everything anew. Zorba shares stories of his travels and past experiences, contrasting with the narrator's desire to engage directly with the mine workers. Zorba advises against this, worried that the narrator's socialist views might lead to exploitation. The narrator then resolves to focus more on the tangible aspects of life rather than his abstract philosophical interests.

Later, Zorba and the narrator continue discussing life and religion. The narrator works fervently on his Buddhist manuscript, dreaming of a better world. Zorba describes three types of people: *those who turn food into fat and waste, those who transform it into work and joy, and those who attempt to make it divine.* He notes that the narrator tries to achieve the latter and struggles when he fails. Zorba also recounts his experience with a Russian man who communicated through dance. The narrator reflects on his traditional education and wishes he could learn Zorba's practical wisdom, feeling that his own life has been less fulfilling compared to Zorba's direct understanding of life's truths.

One morning, the narrator writes a letter to his old friend Stavridakis, expressing his decision to leave his bookish life behind and embrace life on Crete. He reminisces about their shared experiences and admits his deep affection for Stavridakis. This act of writing relieves some of his lingering resentment, and he decides to join Zorba for a walk in the rain. They stop at a café, where the narrator first encounters the captivating widow. Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, declares his love for the widow and threatens to kill himself if she does not marry him. After a brief chat with Mimiko, the village simpleton, Zorba insists the narrator should sleep with the widow, believing it a sin to refuse a woman, but the narrator declines, and they return to their beach camp.

The next day, the narrator joins Zorba and the workers at the mine. During lunch, Zorba hears an unusual noise and promptly evacuates the workers, narrowly avoiding a collapse of the mine. Grateful, one of the workers thanks Zorba for saving their lives. The narrator continues his Buddhist writings to forget the widow, while Zorba urges him to pursue her, even on Christmas Eve. They have Christmas Eve dinner with Madame Hortense, who reminisces about her past. On New Year's Day, the narrator happily heads

towards the village and encounters the widow but remains hesitant. He sits under a flowering almond tree until Zorba finds him. They later attend Madame Hortense's New Year's feast. Zorba shares his plan to build a pulley system for transporting trees down the mountain but needs to purchase supplies in Candia. The next morning, he departs for the town to get the materials.

The narrator receives a response from Stavridakis, who reports the success of his mission but hints that this may be his final letter, expressing deep affection for the narrator. Meanwhile, Zorba, delayed beyond his expected return, writes to say he is well and has been spending time with a woman named Lola. When Bouboulina inquires about Zorba's letter, the narrator, seeing her distress, lies and tells her that the letter praises her and that Zorba plans to marry her upon his return.

Later, while walking back to the village with Bouboulina, they encounter a commotion by the shore. The narrator discovers that Pavli, Mavrandoni's son, has committed suicide because the widow refused to be with him. The villagers, enraged, blame and curse the widow, calling for her death. The narrator defends her, questioning the fairness of blaming her for Pavli's death, while Old Anagnosti suggests that Pavli is better off, as life is full of suffering. That evening, the narrator receives a basket of oranges from the widow, thanking him for his support.

Zorba eventually returns, having stayed in Candia twelve days longer than planned. He is upset to learn that the narrator lied to Bouboulina about the letter, criticizing the cruelty of playing with her emotions. They then head to a monastery to negotiate for the purchase of the monks' forest. On their way, they meet ex-monk Zaharia, who agrees to guide them. That night, a young man is shot and killed, an event that Zorba uses to negotiate a lower price for the forest. Zaharia, inspired by a supposed command from the Archangel Michael, decides to set fire to the monastery.

Continue…